

Vegetable Seeds

Cabbage, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kohlrabi, mustard, turnips, beets, chard, endive, lettuce and radish seeds are covered in this section.

Cabbage is one of the most ancient cultivated vegetables. Cabbage, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kohlrabi, mustard and turnips are all descendants of *Brassica oleracea*, a wild mustard-like weed found mostly along European sea-coasts. Today's "cabbage family" bears little resemblance to its wild ancestral parent. But like the 4000 year old parent plant, they grow best in temperate climates where the weather is cool and there is a plentiful supply of moisture. The seeds of the cabbage family are small, round, and easily sprouted.

Chinese cabbage (*pe-tsai*) is one of the latest additions to the cabbage family in the Western world. It is also called celery cabbage. The Chinese variety has crisp leaves and a mild cabbage flavor.

Cauliflower has been a favorite vegetable in Italy for centuries. Its name means "cabbage flower." It is native to Asia and Europe and has been cultivated since 600 B.C. Cauliflower has been much improved over the centuries and the flower has increased in size by careful cultivation.

Collards and kale are similar, except for the shape of their leaves. They were developed in the Mediterranean and Asia Minor. The Greeks and the Romans both cultivated collards and kale. England adopted them from the Romans and for thousands of years grew them as a major winter vegetable. Kale is also known as borecole. Borecole

probably came from the Dutch word *boerenkool* which means "peasant cabbage." Because it is often grown in the winter, kale has been called winter greens.

Broccoli has been grown by the Greeks and the Romans for 2000 years, although it was not known in the United States until the 1920's. Broccoli was introduced as a "new" vegetable and took only 10 years to become an American favorite. Today more than 100 million pounds are produced in the United States.

Brussels sprouts are named for the capital of Belgium, where they have been cultivated for hundreds of years. Climate is a critical factor in growing Brussels sprouts. It will not develop miniature cabbage heads if the temperature rises above 55 degrees. About 85 percent of the Brussels sprouts grown in the United States are cultivated in San Mateo, Santa Cruz and Monterey counties of California where a coastal fog insures cool temperatures.

Kohlrabi has a German name. *Kohl* means cabbage and *rabi* means turnip. It is one of the few vegetables to originate in Northern Europe. Its flavor resembles a turnip, but is milder. The globe of this unusual looking plant is usually eaten and the leaves discarded.

Mustard originated in the Middle East where it has been under cultivation for over two millennia. It is often mentioned in Biblical, Greek and Roman writings. Hippocrates wrote of its medicinal qualities. Mustard was prepared in the form of a condiment by Mrs. Clements of Durham County England. It is said that she made a small fortune by selling powdered mustard. Today powdered mustard is still known as Durham mustard in England.

Turnips were once believed to be native to Russia and Scandinavia, but they were cultivated in India long before being introduced into Europe. The Romans cultivated many kinds of turnips; round, long

and flat. Today's varieties may weigh as little as a few ounces to as much as 25 pounds. In the 17th century, turnips were used in England as a forage crop. The British planted turnips for crop rotation, thus providing a supply of winter food for cattle and sheep. Turnips have been highly regarded for centuries as a staple winter vegetable where no other produce was available. They were not cultivated in the United States until the early 1600's.

Beets, chard and sugar beets are from the Beta family. All three were developed from a wild species that was common in Southern Europe. The wild plant grew in sandy soil along the sea. Chard is similar to an ancient variety grown in prehistoric times. It is disease free and seldom bothered by insects. For this reason beets and chard are favorites of home gardeners.

Endive originated as an herb growing wild in Southern Europe and the Near East. The ancient Egyptians and Greeks used endive as a vegetable. It is an excellent salad plant similar to lettuce with a somewhat bitter flavor.

Modern lettuce was probably derived from the prickly wild species of the family Compositae, native to Asia Minor and adjacent areas. It gets its name, *Lactuca sativa*, from an Old French word *Laitues* (milky) because of its milky root. Lettuce was served to the kings of Persia over 2500 years ago. Columbus is credited with bringing lettuce to the New World. It is now one of the most universally popular salad plants.

Radishes are also an ancient vegetable. They are believed to be native to China, where they were cultivated in the 7th century B.C. The early Egyptians also enjoyed their flavor. The ancient Greeks enjoyed pelting unpopular politicians with radishes. Radishes come in

a large variety of sizes and colors, from shades of white, pink and red to purple and black. The American or European variety may weigh as little as a few grams, while the *dikon* from Japan often weighs as much as two pounds. Radishes are swift to mature: some are ready to harvest just ten days after planting.

Vegetable seed sprouts are abundant in vitamins and minerals. They are low in calories and easily digested. Vegetable sprouts are a good source of phosphorus, iron and potassium, and are rich in riboflavin, niacin, vitamin C and vitamin A. To make the best use of these succulent little plants, eat them raw in salads or add them to soups just before serving.

Sprouting method	jar
Temperature	68° to 86°
Rinse	twice a day
Harvest length	1 to 2 inches greened
Sprouting time	3 to 5 days
Yield	varies with the seed
	1 T makes
	from 1 to 2 cups

